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ABSTRACT

Discussion of the use of the World Wide Web (WWW) for teaching foreign languages (L2s) begins with an examination of the learning styles of the current population of students, shifts in approaches to learning and teaching, and the changing role for language instructors in this context. It is argued that effective use of WWW resources to teach students L2 grammar and vocabulary means taking advantage of the ways students think: i.e., non-linearly, making connections between disparate pieces of information to formulate a whole. An L2 German exercise is presented that uses such a model of learning, which requires students to: (1) select the context in which they learn and practice grammar from authentic sources, (2) use grammatical structures to organize the data, and (3) integrate new knowledge into their databases through the grammar, with examples for applying this paradigm in the future. (MSE)

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AATG/ ACTFL Presentation
WWW for the students
Joan Keck Campbell, Dartmouth College
Chicago, Nov.21, 1998

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Introduction

Survey participants for languages and levels.

The focus of my presentation today will be on how appropriately structured WWW activities appeal to the learning and thinking styles of today's language students and thus surpass explicit grammar instruction and traditional form-based grammar exercises. In the interest of time, I will focus on this one point today, although one could certainly make many of the same arguments for using the WWW to teach reading comprehension and cultural competence. The WWW is a place in which practical life skills, pedestrian interests and new learning theories are converging. By increasing our students' exposure to this important medium in language instruction, we can give them the edge they will need to succeed in the 21st century.

This session is entitled "The WWW **for** the students; the WWW by the students". I will present the

perspective on FOR the students, talking about teaching grammar and vocabulary via the WWW.

Let's begin today with an important definition. Who are "the students" we teach today?

Changing learning styles of our students

It has by now perhaps become cliché to mention that our student population and they way it learns are both changing rapidly.

But the very basic premise of what we do has not changed all that much: language course design is still essentially a matter of taking students from point A of linguistic competence at the beginning of the course to point B of linguistic competence at the end of the course. Our students are, however, no longer walkers who take a straight path between these points A and B, but rather connectors who link information. Thus rather than taking them by the hand and walking them down the linguistic sidewalk with them, pointing out the landmarks as we go, we should act as facilitators for their own navigation of the material and negotiation of the target language's meaning.

Please indulge me for a moment for one brief example.

When I learned to speak German and French, I walked down the linguistic sidewalk accompanied by many fine teachers who showed me the way to the train station and cautioned me when I approached a steep curb. But when I first learned to walk, I walked in a straight line. My favorite book was George Washington's Breakfast. Every night, I tormented my mother by asking her to read it yet once more. The main character, a young boy named George Allen has one burning question, namely, what did George Washington eat for breakfast each morning? Every night, I marveled at his page by page journey to the truth: the father of our country ate hoecakes for breakfast. And sure enough, every night he reached the same conclusion.

My 8-year-old son's favorite book is RL Stine's The Curse of Horror Island. In this text, Jonathan must make choices about what Indiana Jones and his nephew should do. He makes the decisions about Indy's next move and moves in a non-linear fashion to non-consecutive sections of the book based on his choices. Each time Jonathan reads the text he chooses a different path, giving him more opportunities to explore the margins and gather information.

I would contend that designing a language course should be much like navigating Indy's journey. When I took my straight shot down the sidewalk, I made it there quickly and efficiently, but I missed a lot of what was going on off the sidewalk, that is, a lot of cultural. I had to go back later and cover this ground. As our economy become more global and our world broader, it is imperative that we take our student off the sidewalk.

Having been brought up on books where the reader is free to make her or his own choices about the story's progression, today's student is a better traveling companion, having learned to navigate her learning jouney in a non-linear fashion.

I was recently confronted with this myself, as my intermediate German students were to give an oral presentation on on-line newspapers vs. traditional print media. Before their presentations, I give the students the option of showing me their outline so that we can go over any shaky grammar or vocabulary. Much to my surprise, I was presented with a bubble map, rather than a point by point summary of Katy's arguments. Katy linked her points

about the advantages and disadvantages of on-line sources just like links are built on the WWW.

Changing role for instructors

So what are we as foreign language instructors supposed to do with these students who were brought up on Indiana Jones and bubble maps? How do we design meaningful grammar and vocabulary exercises for them?

We should first let go of what Finkel and Monk in 1983 called the "Atlas complex" [1]

> {Instructors} assume full responsibility for all that goes on. They supply motivation, insight, clear explanation, and even intellectual curiosity. In exchange, their students supply almost nothing but a faint imitation of the academic performance that they witness.

To return to my metaphor, students are taken by the hand and walked down the sidewalk. We have to help our students navigate a distant culture by learning both structurally and socially how to communicate in

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[1]Finkel, D. & Monk, G.S. (1983). Teachers and learning groups: Dissolution of the Atlas complex. In C. Boutin & R.Y. Garth (Eds.), *Learning in groups* (pp.8-97). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

the target language. What better way to do this than by using the WWW to give our students immediate access to authentic sources in the target culture? But too often WWW activities are relegated to the "something extra" drawer of the teacher's desk. Once we have gotten through the grammar and vocabulary in this chapter, if we have time, we will look at this WWW site related to the topic. I think that we need to take the WWW out of this drawer and use it directly in the teaching and reinforcement of grammar and vocabulary because so much current learning theory supports the modes it utilizes in the supply of information.

I would now like to give you one specific examples of a WWW exercise that teaches a specific point of grammar and vocabulary and show you how recent educational theory would support the increased use of such exercises.

WWW addressing changing needs of students and instructors

Using WWW-based activities to teach students grammar and vocabulary in L2 means taking advantage of the way in which students' brains are already working, that is, making non-linear connections between pieces of information to

formulate a whole that is not constructable in a linear fashion.

How can we make our students' learning more meaningful by using the WWW? Richard Mayer from UCSB posits a generative theory of multimedia learning in which:

> Meaningful learning occurs when learners *select* relevant information from what is presented, *organize* the piece of information into coherent mental representation, and *integrate* the newly constructed representation with others. . . . the learner is viewed as a knowledge constructor who actively selects and connects pieces of visual and verbal knowledge. [2]

This is the model on which I have based the following WWW exercise. Learners will ideally:

select

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[2] Mayer, Richard E. (1997) "Multimedia Learning: Are We Asking the Right Questions?" Educational Psychology, *32* (1), p.1-19.

learners select from authentic sources the context in which they learn and practice grammar

organize

learners use structure of the language = GRAMMAR = to organize the data

integrate

learners assimilate new knowledge to their database via the grammar with examples for applying this paradigm in the future

To introduce and practice subordinating and coordinating conjunctions to my intermediate German language students, I use the WWW site of the Bundestag as a primary source.
http://www.bundestag.de/info/mdb13/mdb/132.htm

Here I step back from my Atlas role, not prescribing what should be analyzed, but rather giving the students analysis paradigms so that they can apply what they've learned to other situations.

This requires the presentation of grammar in a situational pattern, rather than simply using explicate examples and giving the L1 equivalent. While traditional textbook explanations such as

these showing the rules for using subordinating conjunctions and their English equivalents still have their place, I now prefer situational diagrams such as this,

WENN -----> DANN
(if) (then)

KONDITION----->KONSEQUENZ

BEVOR = 1.STATION -----> 2.STATION

so that students can use conjunctions to organize the data they gather about the Bundestag. This means going beyond this traditional workbook exercise,

to put this grammar to work while acquiring new vocabulary on the WWW. We all know that mechanical grammar practice does not necessarily result in meaningful practice. The learner need not understand what is going on in these sentences as long as she can perform the mechanical operation. And as van Patten aptly reminds us in Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen,

> Features of language, be they grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation or something else, can only make their way into the learner's mental

> representation of the language system if they have been linked to some kind of real-world meaning. [3]

If the learner does not find meaning of the information conveyed by the sentence elements (s)he is attempting to connect with the German conjunctions, then (s)he does not understand the grammar (s)he is supposedly practicing here. By shifting to authentic materials on the WWW, we focus on the learning process, and simultaneously on the "real-world meaning" to which van Patten refers

Let me show you now some of the "real-world meaning" my students created when working on the Bundestag site.

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[3] van Patten, Bill & Lee, James F. Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995.

Deutsch III
Netzübung zum Thema: der deutsche Bundestag

Die Leitseite für den deutschen Bundestag hat viele interessante Informationen über die Mitglieder des Bundestages (MdB). Hier finden Sie viel Statistik über die Mitglieder.

http://www.bundestag.de/info/mdb13/mdb/132.htm

Sehen Sie sich die einzelnen Kategorien an und schreiben Sie für jede Kategorie zwei neue Tatsachen, die Sie hier gelernt haben. Schreiben Sie in jedem Satz eine Konjunktion von der Liste. Sie dürfen jede Konjunktion nur einmal benutzen.

als	*während*	*nachdem*
da	*weil*	*seit*
bevor	*entweder / oder*	*seitdem*
damit	*weder / noch*	*bis*
ob	*wenn*	*solange*
obgleich	*obwohl*	*sobald*
ehe		

Verteilung nach Bundesländern

Frauen im Parlament

Mitgliedschaft in Wahlperioden

Schulbildung

Religion

Altersgliederung

Jetzt suchen Sie Informationen über die einzelnen Mitglieder des Bundestags. Sie finden eine alphabetische Liste ihrer Biographien hier:
http://www.bundestag.de/mdb14/bio/a.htm

Suchen Sie sich drei Mitglieder (von verschiedenen Parteien) aus und schreiben Sie einen kurzen Bericht mit folgender Information:

1. Woher kommt sie/er?

2. Wielange sitzt sie/er schon im Bundestag?

3. Wofür interessiert sie/er sich politisch?

MdB 1

MdB 2

MdB 3

GLOSSAR

die Mitglieder - members
MdB - Mitglied des Bundestags
die Altersgliederung - age profile
die Verteilung - distribution
die Mitgliedschaft - membership
das Gremium - committee
der Ausschuß - commission
ordentlich - regular (as in representative)
stellvertretend - acting, ex officio
die Landesliste - district

In the preceding exercise, students learn to navigate their own information and use the grammatical paradigms to make their own connections.

I would argue that exercises of this type meet the goals set forth not only in the most recent learning theories I have mentioned (van Patten, for example and James Burke's recent suggestion of a new connective model of knowledge or "the beginning of the end of reductionism".

> What we will start to look at will be intelligence not in terms of can you memorize something . . . . and instead start thinking of intelligence in terms of the way people make imaginative links among data.[4]

This is also reflected in Stern's 1983 model where creativity is not simply conforming to an existing system, but rather imposing order and regularity on language data with which one is confronted, i.e. the ability to go beyond the limits of what the student has been taught in the

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[4] Burke, James. "Making the Connections with James Burke." (1998) Educom Review *33* (6 - Nov/Dec, 1998), p.16-22.

classroom – beyond tables explaining conjunctions.

What are the advantages of this shift to the WWW?

1. If students approach the source material in a non-linear non-prescribed fashion, then they will have more opportunities to practice the grammatical structure and vocabulary point as hand. Let's return to the Bundestag example I presented. When looking at the raw data on the site, my students each chose to highlight different point and thus drew different conclusions about the Bundestag data. There were thus a wide variety of contexts in which students could use conjunctions to explain the relationships of two pieces of information. For example, some may have expected that the members of parliament would have few PhDs among their ranks while others might have not been surprised by this relatively high number. Such discrepancies give students more materials for discussion. In general, my students tend to disagree with each other the more we work with materials on the WWW. While this may not always ensure personal harmony, it does make classroom conversations extremely spontaneous and lively, and good fodder for grammar practice.

2. Grammar in and of itself provides important structure to the language, but it is meaningless without cultural context. Seeking out authentic WWW sources provides students with an appropriate cultural context for practicing grammar and vocabulary. For example, the conjunctions

da / weil /denn

can all be translated into English as "because", but there are very important distinctions in meaning. Classroom exchanges revolving around the interpretation of authentic source data provide important opportunities to practice these differences.

3. Using the WWW as a context for teaching grammar should not be viewed as replacement technology. What it does practically is to free up time normally allotted to long explanations of grammar and shifts students' efforts toward absorbing authentic cultural materials, so that while the students are learning and practicing grammar, they are also learning about the culture of L2-speaking countries. This gives students a real competitive edge in situations outside of the classroom (exchange programs or AATG testing for example).

4. Finally, getting at grammar and vocabulary via authentic L2 materials on the WWW allows students to serve what Erwin Tschirner has called a "Cognitive Apprenticeship"[5], that is new skills and new knowledge are learned in the manner in which they will be used rather than in isolation. This means learning about the use of the conjunctions by using the conjunctions while situating oneself in the community of the target language.

This is, of course, where we want our students to be when they have reached point B of our language instruction journey, situated in this L2 community and in possession of the tools they need to navigate their way throughout the many twists and turns on the linguistic highway.

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[5] Tschirner, Erwin. (1997) "Neue Perspektiven für DaF durch die neuen Medien." Die Unterrichtspraxis *30* (2 - Fall, 1997)

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